

Lei Zhang

Class Observation

Cynthia Myers

English101D2

Academic writing for graduates

Description of the class:

English101D is taught by instructor Mrs. Cynthia Myers from English Department at ISU and it aims to help in-coming new graduates acquire proficiency in academic writing (journals, book reviews, and experiment reports, etc) in their future studies. Most graduate students in 101D class are those who failed to pass both English Placement and diagnostic tests in writing and need to have a systematic training and practice. The class meets three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday in both normal classrooms and computer lab with each period of 50 minutes. In normal classroom, students focus on topics outlines in textbook and practice through specific writing assignments, while in computer lab, they are offered opportunity to do text analysis, which requires them to analyze academic articles and journals of their fields of study and apply what they have learned in textbooks.

Observation:

The lesson observed was on Friday, Oct 26, 2007 and the class met at a computer lab at Ross Hall. The major task of the lesson was to help students familiarize with an oral presentation assignment and at same time address

some related problems in the use of Microsoft Powerpoint as a presentation aid. At the beginning of the class, Mrs. Cynthia spent 10 minutes announcing a recent assignment of oral presentation, which required students to report their reviews of journal articles chosen from their specialized fields. Some details of the assignment, such as, suggested topics, visual support, evaluation criteria and reflection, were given to students during the process. Then Mrs. Cynthia had students divide into groups to brainstorm the *Advantages and Disadvantages of using Powerpoint in Presentation*. After 5-6 minutes, Mrs. Cynthia began to collect the discussion results and had students share them in class. The discussion actually was very fruitful and efficient because students came up many ideas that had been covered in Mrs. Cynthia's own analysis worksheet. During the checking-up of students' discussion results, Mrs. Cynthia used Powerpoint to show students both good and bad examples of using Powerpoint and left students a deep impression about the inappropriate use of Powerpoint. In the rest time of the lesson, Mrs. Cynthia guided students to the discussion of another topic related to their coming presentation, *Problems When Speaking in Front of Public*, which aimed to help students to overcome possible difficulties in their coming oral presentation. One thing commendable in Mrs. Cynthia's two discussions is her proper and efficient time allotment, neither of which exceeded 6 minutes and left enough time for ensuing activities.

Analysis and reflections:

From observation, Mrs. Cynthia's teaching philosophy in writing can be revealed mainly through following aspects. First, she believes that class should be student-centered and interactive. This is particularly obvious in her design of class activities, which involved frequent group discussions addressing to major topics in question. In most discussions, students are encouraged to use prewriting techniques, like brainstorm, listing, cubing or outlining, to ponder over a subject in different perspectives. In addition, discussions on different topics are well-designed to be interlocking and connected with each other, thus keeping students on the track of exploring a general objective in the whole. For example, the teaching objective of the observed lesson was to have students familiarize with academic presentation. To help students successfully achieve the goal, Mrs. Cynthia introduced two related discussions on problems when speaking in public and advantages and disadvantages in using Powerpoint to give

presentation respectively. Second, she requires her students to apply whatever they have learned to real-life situations and cases. Apart from writing practice of textbook guidelines, she meets her students once a week at computer lab to do analysis of various journals, research reports, review from different fields of students own specializations. By reading and analyzing many academic writing samples from their own fields of studies, students will have more concrete ideas as to how textbook rules are reflected and applied in real cases. Third, teaching of grammar in writing was also appropriately addressed in Mrs. Cynthia's class. She never teaches grammars in isolation, instead, she tends to tie grammatical problems to the specific problems or structures students need to use in a particular assignment. One thing I found very effective is her particular way of grammar correction. In most cases, she just simply underlines grammatical errors for students at first and has them correct the errors by themselves. After that, she reviews students' self-correction and provides them with final correct forms. Meanwhile, she picks out major grammatical errors and addresses them in class to bring students to their full awareness. In short, English101D is a very practical writing course in that it helps students build up ability to write for academic purposes, which are extremely beneficial for graduate students in their future studies. However, one insufficiency of the course might be, since it mainly confined to the writing of academic articles and essays, less pre-writing activities can be applied and therefore less diversity in writing practice are explored in class.

Other observations:

1) Textbook (*Write Up Research*):

Textbook is frequently used for guidelines and major exercises in Monday and Wednesday's meeting in normal classrooms.

2) Types of in-class activities:

Group discussion and brainstorming are the major forms of in-class activities in discussion of a particular topic or subject. Lab analysis of academic writings is used as a supplement for student to practice what they have learned in textbooks.

Marilyn Reedy

English99L

Academic listening for undergraduates

Description of the class:

English99L is taught by an ESL instructor Mrs. Marilyn Reedy at English Department, ISU. The course is one of her favorite courses and it aims to improve new international undergraduates' listening proficiency and help them meet the requirements of academic listening in their fields of study. The class meets three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday at traditional classrooms. In classroom, Mrs. Marilyn guides students through their textbooks and have them practice listening exercises in textbooks. Sometimes, additional listening resources are given to students as a supplement to in-class listening, such as online listening activity and podcasts.

Observation:

The English99L lesson observed was on Thursday afternoon, Nov 1, 2007. At the beginning of the class, Mrs. Marilyn had students review one of their online listening assignments and asked them to hand in a report of listening resources they had accessed. Then, the class moved on to the major task of the period, to review three listening skills and practice one of them through in-class activity. One of the listening skills/strategies Mr. Marilyn would like her student to familiarize with was listening for organization in lectures. However, instead of overwhelming students with tons of sample lectures to listen and practice, Mrs. Marilyn tried to experiment something new in class. After having student review some key points in listening for organization in lectures, she asked students to come up with their mini-lectures for presentation, in which, some common organizational plans used by lecture writers are explored and applied. By preparing for the mini-lecture presentation, students learn to construct an organized article that could be easily understood by their audience. In the rest time of the lesson,

students were divided into 5-6 groups and worked on their lectures collaboratively. Mrs. Marilyn showed her full patience and an amiable nature by walking through the class and talking with each groups about their topics of lectures. However, the whole discussion activity consumed much more time than Mrs. Marilyn had expected because the activity was rather new and unfamiliar to students and it required more time for preparation. As a result, the presentation part was postponed to the next period.

Analysis and reflections:

Mrs. Marilyn Reedy's English99L is another example of student-centered class. In-class discussions are frequently conducted and multi-techniques in different forms of activities to improve students' listening proficiency are applied in classroom. For example, one of the objectives of the observed lesson was to have students familiarize with a listening strategy, listening for organization in lectures. Apart from listening to sample lectures and doing exercises, students were told to analyze some "organizational plans" used by lecture writers and learn to use them in their 5-minute mini-lectures. This experimental activity prompted student to explore mechanics of lecture writing and helped them build up a background of academic lectures that contributed to their comprehension. Mrs. Marilyn believes that through this different form of activity, students were exposed to enough repetition to get a good understanding of the listening strategies discussed in class. Another feature of English99L is the diverse sources of listening materials. Frankly speaking, it is a little hard and inefficient to conduct a listening class in a normal classroom with only the support of tape recorder and projector. However, internet resources are provided to the students in class to supplement the absence of listening lab. Apart from doing textbook exercises in class, students are guided to some web listening resources to improve their listening skills after class. In particular, podcasts of each unit from textbook are available for students to download and listen to in their portable MP3 players. This is especially commendable in the effort to supplementing the insufficiency of normal classroom. In general, the teaching aids used in English99L showed us an example of how to use available web-resources to compensate the insufficiency of technology in traditional listening classroom. At last, in terms of weakness of the class, one thing I think needs to paid attention is the time allotment of discussion in group discussion. In contrast

with Mrs. Cynthia's short but high-efficient group discussion, discussion in Mrs. Marilyn's classroom took a rather long time and postponed the presentation of mini-lectures to the next period. Since it was the first time such an activity was experimented according to Mrs. Marilyn's introduction, the time allotment could be appropriately shortened if Mrs. Marilyn had her students prepare the assignment beforehand after class.

Other observations:

1) Textbook (*Listen to Learn: Learn to Listen - 2nd Edition*):

The use of textbook is very important in class and students and teacher follow the guidelines in textbook and practice most of the exercises in the textbook.

2) Types of In-class activities:

Most types of activities are in-class practice of listening exercises in textbook, coupled with discussions and presentations on related topics

John B. House

Reading & writing 4H

Preparing for TOEFL reading

Description of the class:

The reading and writing class level 4 is taught by instructor Mr. John B. House from English Department's IEOP program. The majority of students in IEOP class are international students who hope to be future undergraduates at ISU. However, they failed to pass TOEFL and haven't met ISU's entry requirements. Therefore, this class is aiming at improving their reading and writing skills in order to help them pass iBT TOEFL at the end of the semester. The class meets three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, mostly in traditional classrooms.

Sometimes they meet in computer lab to do online readings activities. Since the beginning of the semester, a brand-new textbook, *Weave it together*, has been introduced to the class as a major source of in-class reading. Therefore, most classroom activities are centered on topics and exercises in the textbook.

Observation:

The class observed was scheduled on Nov 2, 2007, Friday. At the beginning of the class, Mr. John House read newspaper headlines and chatted with students about recent news events. The headlines and news stories were chosen from a variety of newspapers (eg. Des Moines Paper, Iowa Daily, New York Times, etc.) and therefore provided abundant reading sources and choices for students. After 10 minutes of chatting on news stories, Mr. John B House led students to review some comprehension exercises from the second reading in a unit in the textbook on the topic of introverts and extroverts. He frequently asked students questions related to the exercises to check their comprehension. Sometimes, when coming across an interesting topic in exercises, he elaborated it and engaged students into a very short discussion. For example, one interesting question raised was, what kinds of jobs are suitable for introverts and extroverts respectively. The rest of the class hours was spent mainly in this kind of discussion and checking up activity until all the exercises were finished. With his humorous and witty remarks and easy-going nature, Mr. John B House controlled the class in an ease and relaxing atmosphere and constantly challenged students with his thought-provoking questions.

Analysis of observation:

Mr. John B House briefly sums up his teaching philosophy as follows, he wants his students to leave classroom having gained something valuable and memorable, as well as a renewed feeling of confidence in their English skills and an increase in enthusiasm for learning. He believes successful teaching should be centered on students and teachers only serve as facilitators to promote the learning process. He also thinks, in order to elicit maximum language production in class, a teacher should try his/her best to lower the barriers between students and teachers by creating an ease, comfortable, and relaxing atmosphere in class. As a matter of fact, after only one

class of observation, I could see that Mr. John B. House has successfully executed his teaching philosophy in class. He pays much attention to create a humorous and relaxing atmosphere in class and often uses witty and funny remarks to arouse students' attention. In order to make reading interesting and funny in class, Mr. John B House has his special techniques. He tries to find anything in the body of text that merit further discussion in class. He also likes to pick out sentences or phrases or idiomatic expressions or grammatical structures and make them topic of discussion. To facilitate students' construction of new information from reading, he frequently applies top-down strategy to recall students' previous storage of knowledge by attempting to connect whatever is being read at present to something else that may have been discussed earlier in class. In addition, although a majority of time is devoted to textbook reading and exercises, Mr. John B House never follows a reading as it is presented in textbook. Instead, he enriches students' comprehension of readings by adding much of his personal observations and opinions and trying to raise related questions. Particularly, the approach turns traditional boring exercises checking-up into an interesting and more productive activity. Apart from aforementioned features in Mr. John B House's class, one thing particularly recommendable is his effort to lead students to diverse sources of readings in daily life. He supplements the lessons with online readings and exercises, timed readings and comprehension questions, and a weekly newsletter with short articles about current events that are almost always interesting. He also have students write journal entries weekly and submit them online and conduct story-building exercises from time to time. To sum up, Mr. John B House is a very good ESL teacher in that he has clear teaching objectives, effective teaching methods and a unique humorous and relaxing teaching style. However, one thing I have observed insufficient in class is lack of group discussion. In most occasions, Mr. John B House triggers discussion in the whole class and encourages teaching-students communication whereas the students-students communication in group discussion is neglected to some extent.

Other observations:

1) Textbook (*Weave It Together*):

Textbook is very important in class since most lessons center on the readings and the review after-reading

exercises. Students and teacher generally follow the guidelines of textbook in the process of teaching and learning.

2) Types of In-class activities:

Discussions on certain topics from readings in textbook are the most frequent in class. Other activities are also made available for students as a supplement to their reading, including, online reading, timed-reading in class, chatting on weekly news-stories and recent events, writing journal entries weekly, story-building exercises

Some comparison between undergraduate and graduate English courses:

Two of the lessons observed are of undergraduate level (English99L) ,or pre-undergraduate level (Writing and Reading 4H) and one of graduate (English101D) level. A brief comparison came as a result of observation.

Something different:

Graduate course uses textbooks for its outlines and teacher only gives instruction on major chapters. The choices of exercises and assignments are various for graduate students and not limited to textbook exercises. Most of exercises focus on the practice and application of textbook theories and have high requirements, involving oral presentation, journal article report and analysis.

Undergraduate course centers more on the completion of all textbook content and requires students to carry out most exercises and activities in textbooks to consolidate their skills. There are limited choices of class activities for students in classroom and teachers tend to adopt traditional teaching method to fulfill their course objectives. Therefore, students have less opportunities to apply textbook theories to the solution of real-life problems through doing analysis and research.

Something in common:

Teaching in both graduate and undergraduate classroom is student-centered and focuses on the development of integrated skills of language, not a specific skill in isolation. For example, the writing class observed involves activities of reading and speaking, the listening class incorporates practice of writing and speaking, all of which effectively contribute to the development of language skills in an all-rounded way.